

# Fort Carson's growth creates opportunities

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There is no doubt about it, Fort Carson is growing. As additional new units and Soldiers make their way to Fort Carson, planning for significant growth is of critical importance to the installation and the people living and working here.

It is easy to plan things from a short-term perspective, but such planning can end up requiring more work and costs down the road if not done sustainably and with a long-range view. As part of its sustainability goals, Fort Carson recently adopted "Smart Growth" principles in master planning to prepare for the growth of the installation.

"Smart Growth" at Fort Carson is development that supports the mission of training Soldiers and units, while developing strong communities and protecting the environment now and into the future, according to Tom Wiersma, Fort Carson Community Planner with the Directorate of Public Works. "Smart Growth" will help Fort Carson grow in a way that conserves resources for the future while increasing the health of communities, readiness of units and environmental stewardship of the area.

Fort Carson is not alone in developing growth principles that focus on sustainability. The Army has become a strong proponent within the Department of Defense in supporting the triple bottom line of sustainability: mission, community and the environment.

"Communities are recognizing problems associated with sprawl development and are taking steps to curb highly dispersed development patterns that have been characteristic of development in the United States for the past 50 years," said Wiersma. "With all future development, Fort Carson wants to insure that open space is available for close-in training opportunities while not increasing requirements for vehicle transportation between facilities and complexes. Growth principles will allow Fort Carson to improve training opportunities by conserving resources and protecting the environment."

The following are a few examples of the "Smart Growth" principles being implemented in master planning decisions at Fort Carson.

- **Promoting military cohesiveness and efficiency in training:** Unit facilities will be located, when possible, in such a way that units retain their identity while creating flexibility as they deploy from and redeploy to Fort Carson. Co-locating military training facilities and protecting "close-in" training areas for military units will also reduce transportation requirements and costs.
- **Minimizing the development of open spaces:** New development will avoid sprawl development, which increases long-term infrastructure costs and degrades quality of life by eliminating natural, open space. Discussion is underway to construct buildings that grow up (more stories), rather than grow out and locating buildings closer together. This more compact design requires fewer feet of utility lines, such as water, sewer, gas, electricity, phone service,

etc. Planning will include an “open space” infrastructure plan that sets aside areas that should be protected from development, such as parks, recreation areas, natural habitat, forest, prairie, wetlands and environmentally-sensitive areas.

- **Improving walk-ability of installation neighborhoods:** One-fourth of all trips people make are one mile or less, but three-fourths of these trips are made by car, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Developing green walkways that connect facility locations will promote pedestrian traffic and reduce the need for vehicle use. Increasing the number and quality of walk-able communities by building multiple destinations close together will also encourage walking. A distance of ¼ mile is considered the standard distance people will walk to easily get from one place to another.
- **Planning living, shopping and working areas close together:** Combining living, working and service-related facilities will promote ease of use for customers on Fort Carson. In Soldier areas, there are plans to continue co-locating barracks, operations facilities, motor pools, chapels, fitness centers and Army and Air Force Exchange Service facilities. Plans also include creating administrative/headquarters/directorate high-density areas that co-locate offices that work closely together. The emphasis will be on increasing development to promote walking/biking instead of the use of cars.
- **Building new areas close to existing utilities:** The most cost-efficient locations for new development are where roads, sewers, water lines, gas lines and other utilities already exist. Locating facilities close to existing infrastructure also preserves open space for close-in training; creates wildlife corridors; preserves water quality; reduces maintenance requirements; and provides for a better quality of life through recreational opportunities, improved health and reduced traffic.
- **Encouraging community input in development decisions.** Gaining support for future development increases the likelihood of long-term project success. The community perspective is important to insure that mixed-use, compact, walk-able and transportation-rich communities are developed on Fort Carson because this type of development represents a departure from what is conventional and familiar.

Rapid growth is a sticky problem to tackle with the speed in which development needs to occur. Implementing Smart Growth principles will help ensure planning and development are acceptable at the installation-level, and will also provide a healthy and pleasing living and working environment for the Fort Carson community.

“The Army isn't the only organization feeling pressure to go bigger and better in short time frame with little money,” said Birgitte Dodd, Fort Carson Sustainability Planner. “This is the critical time to do things smart and efficiently. Fort Carson has a real chance to use cutting edge tools and concepts to make what looks ‘mission impossible’, possible.”

For more information, call the community planner at 526-4265.